



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE MEDITATION ON THE PASSION

BY CARPACCIO

BY pretty general consent, the most noteworthy picture of the collection of Sir William Neville Abdy, sold in London last May (from which comes the newly acquired Botticelli, noted elsewhere in this issue of the *BULLETIN*), was the painting by Carpaccio, called in the catalogue a *Pietà*, but more correctly, though as yet inexactly named by Sir Claude Phillips, in an article in the June number of the *Burlington Magazine*, the *Meditation on the Passion*. This picture the Museum has bought from Messrs. Sulley & Co., who purchased it at the sale. Without exaggeration it may be confidently said that this work, now exhibited in Gallery 30, will be considered as among the two or three most important paintings ever purchased by the Museum.

The attribution to Carpaccio may indeed at first sight be questioned, so different is it in its mystical intensity from the generally familiar productions of this delightful artist, pervaded as these are with the love of pageantry and ceremonial, or the naive noting of circumstances of prevailing custom. But further acquaintance, the study of points of resemblance to known works, and a comparison with certain other pictures in which a devout sentiment is embodied (but in no other instance attained with such triumphant potency) will tend to establish the ascription. Similarity of details will be found in many well-authenticated pictures, in the *Holy Family at Caen*, for instance, or in the *Madonna and Saints* in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum at Berlin, in *Christ shedding His Blood into a Chalice at Vienna*, or the *St. George killing the Dragon* in the *Scuola degli Schiavoni* at Venice; while the *Agony in the Garden* in the same church and above all the *Burial of Christ* at Berlin, are like our picture not only morphologically but in a deeper sense—in the spirituality of the expression.

These works cited are of the artist's later life and they all show in more or less degree the influence of the styles of Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini at a period many years earlier than the time of their painting, in-

fluences that had but slight hold on his youthful production. The later paintings are archaistic. Instead of adopting the far-reaching novelties which were in those years so rapidly transforming Venetian painting into that mighty force which has left its impress on all subsequent art, a force in the creation of which he had no mean share, Carpaccio in his old age returned to an earlier fashion. The joyous art of his young manhood having gone from him, he chose these sober masters as guides on the austere and lonely ways his changing outlook forced him to take.

The arrangement of our picture is as follows: In the center, in an attitude of sleep, the dead Christ reclines on a ruined marble throne of Renaissance workmanship. His head has fallen on his shoulder; one arm rests on the side of the throne, the other hangs down stiffly with the hand crisped as though newly removed from the cross. The crown of thorns is on the ground, leaning against a stone inscribed with imitations of Hebrew letters, which fills up the space between the supports of the chair. On either side of the Christ sit two emaciated old men of extraordinary aspect, clothed in the scantiest garments, in attitudes of profound thought or intense self-questioning. They look neither at the Christ nor at each other, but each seems meditating by himself, and the subject of his meditations, as is shown by the body of the Redeemer, is the mystery of the Atonement. According to the emblems by which he is surrounded, the lion, book, beads, and crutch, the old man at the left is St. Jerome as the anchorite in the desert. He is absorbed in the solemnity of his thought. With rigid visage and hand clasping the tunic on his breast, he looks toward the beholder and seems about to rise from the boulder on which he sits. The posture is one of great energy, well in accord with the masterful character which won for this saint the lion as his symbol. The meditations of the companion who faces him are calmer. He is weighing inwardly certain points of his argument, as the explanatory gesture of his right hand, his gaze into vacancy, and his general attitude with chin resting on palm and elbow on knee

PUBLISHED MONTHLY

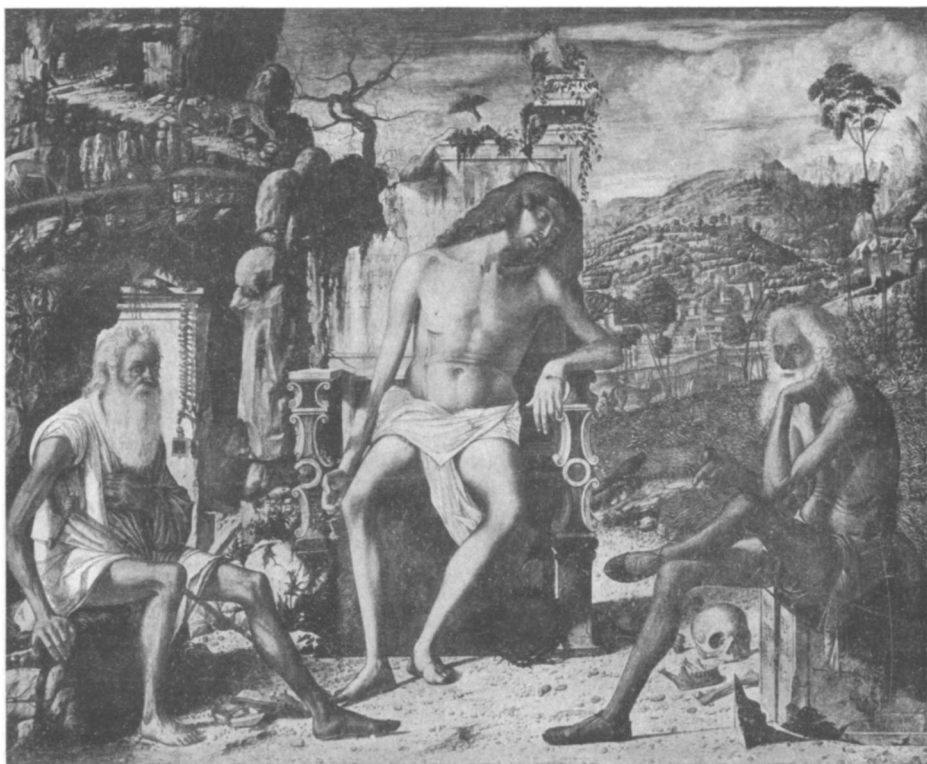
PRICE TEN CENTS

BULLETIN OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

VOLUME VI

NEW YORK, OCTOBER, 1911

NUMBER 10



THE MEDITATION ON THE PASSION
BY CARPACCIO

plainly point out. There is no attribute by which this figure may be definitely named and the most learned students have as yet been unable to discover his identity. The skull and bones on the ground near him in all probability refer to Golgotha. He is of the Hermit Saints—perhaps St. Anthony, whom St. Jerome visited in the desert, St. Paul the Hermit, St. Onuphrius, or any of the others who are represented as old men worn by their penance. His seat is a broken fragment of architecture, and like the throne it is engraved with imitation Hebrew characters. On its side near the ground is painted a paper on which is the false signature of "Andreas Mantinea F."¹

The setting for these imposing figures is a landscape of solemn beauty. At the left is a rocky mount, and by a road which winds up it to the confines of the frame are wild animals, a deer grazing, a leopard catching a deer, and a wolf looking into a cavern. In the meadow at the right of the picture are other creatures: a leopard following a deer where the hillside drops down to a river, a scarlet bird, and two rabbits, all perhaps to show that the communion

took place in the desert. There is a city on the far side of the river at the base of a hill with cultivated fields outlined by well-kept trees; beyond are mountains lit up with late sunlight, and above is an evening sky of angry blue. The sunlight is on the figures in the foreground as well and casts long shadows on the pebble-covered ground.

It is not known as yet in what ecclesiastical writing is the passage which our picture illustrates. For we may be sure that it is a literal illustration of some abstract theme, and that each seemingly fanciful detail has an exact literary significance, either as a subject of the sacred conversation, or as an emblem or attribute of thoughts in the minds of the participants. Until such time as the exact theme may be discovered, the title given, *The Meditation on the Passion*, is close enough to the thought of the picture to serve as a suitable appellation.

It is regrettable that the Burlington Magazine was unable to permit the editor of the BULLETIN to reprint in its entirety in this issue the very able treatise on our picture by Sir Claude Phillips, as we had hoped might be possible. In it is a full discussion of the questions of attribution, comparisons, and subject, and I take pleasure in recommending it to those interested.

B. B.

¹ By a strange coincidence both this false signature and this same enigmatic personage, identical in type and very similar in pose, occur in the *Burial of Christ* in Berlin, the picture to which ours bears the closest relationship.

